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A Defunct Satellite Is Said to Be Target For Test of Weapon

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WASHINGTON, Sept. 5 — The Air Force has apparently settled on a six-year-old military research satellite called Solwind as the first target for a new American anti-satellite weapon, according to a private analyst.

The analyst, John Pike of the Federation of American Scientists, said today that Solwind will be in the right spot for the test on the afternoon of Friday, Sept. 13.

A Congressional source who was briefed on details of the test confirmed the test date and said Mr. Pike's identification of the target "rings a bell."

Private analysts said that if Solwind is the target, the Air Force has set itself a difficult task. The out-of-service satellite is substantially smaller than most Soviet reconnaissance satellites that would be the targets of an anti-satellite weapon in wartime, and is in a somewhat higher orbit.

Mr. Pike said the identity of the target, which is a military secret, "jumps out at you" from a study of public records on satellites in orbit.

Mr. Pike said he deduced the identity by poring over published lists of American satellites, selecting those within the known range of the anti-satellite weapon. Then he applied bits of information from the Air Force that have become public, such as the fact that the target would be a military satellite rather than a National Aeronautics and Space Administration satellite, and that it had been on a scientific mission. He found about 15 defunct military satellites, three of them on scientific missions, and only one within the range of the anti-satellite weapon.